The Men Who Found Marquis Wheat

A Great Work for Canada by Dr. Angus Mackay, William Saunders and Charles E. Saunders

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Some say that the Marquis, most remarkable of American wheats, king of the Northwest prairie, is simply the result of a chain of chance happenings and accidents.

Others — and these are the majority — believe it was Dr. Charles E. Saunders who discovered Marquis wheat by his exact experiments in plant breeding. The people of Canada, indeed, have rewarded Doctor Saunders with a pension of $5,000 a year for life.

But the true story of how this early-ripening, heavy-yielding wheat came to bless the settlers of the Northwest lands has more than one hero. Of course Charles Saunders did help to find it, there's no doubt about that — though he couldn't have had any notion of what a wonderful filler of the bread basket of the world he was fussing around with.

And accidents? Why, the story goes that the very first head of what grew to be Marquis wheat got tossed up in a bag on top of a cupboard and came near being lost forever.

This famous wheat has a topsy-turvy story. Dig through the dusty records that are scattered here and there, talk to the slit-eyed old timers of Saskatchewan, and you will clearly see what a mixed up crew of men helped chance and accident to see the Marquis born.

Aside from the highly educated doctors of philosophy, Charles and Percy Saunders, these wheat hunters were not at all what today would be called scientists.

Chief of the whole assorted crew stood William Saunders, father of those college boys. Old William himself was only a druggist, with a hobby for breeding gooseberries.

But he had a dream, too — it was a hunch for a tremendous experiment to find out exactly how many kinds of things would grow in the strong black soil and the short dangerous summer of the Canadian Northwest.

He got the chance to try it in the last twenty years of his life. He took a shot at everything, from roses to turnip, from hardwood trees to unknown wheats from the Himalaya Mountains — and the early-ripening Marquis came out of that strange confused experiment. William Saunders had a great knack for picking helpers.

There was Thomas Sharpe, the stubborn, sarcastic pioneer of the Turtle Mountains; he picked the first spike of what became Marquis wheat way back in 1892. And William Macoun, the earnest and upright apple expert, must not be forgotten. Macoun nursed and coddled the young Marquis in a plot for five years, long before anybody had a notion it would chase the good Red Fife wheat off the prairies.

But more important than any, save old William Saunders himself, was the Saskatchewan settler, Angus Mackay. He had invented the summer fallow that took the pioneers out of the frying pan of the drought. It was Mackay who first saw that the Marquis wheat would take them out of the ice box of the frost. But, denying all credit for himself, Mackay only said: "It was the fact of the frost that made Marquis wheat"

In the years of the middle eighteen-eighties the settlers of Western Canada were in a bad way. They had a great wheat, the famous Red Fife. Not even the Marquis beats the Red Fife for strong, creamy, white flour, bringing the very best price. But Nature wouldn't seem to let them raise it.

One year the settlers would say "God is good," and their crop of Red Fife would very nearly pay for the farm. But the next? A man might just manage to stick through a summer when less than three inches of rain would cut his yield to five bushels to the acre — hardly enough to pull his binder out of the barn for.

Then the year after that, a sudden frost in August would turn what looked like a forty bushel-to-the-acre crop into chicken feed.

It was a gamble. All over Manitoba, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, homesteads built with high hopes stood empty, prairie grass growing up to the doors, their builders beaten by those two demons, drought and frost.

The settlers who were left sighed for help. There must be a wheat as good as the Red Fife, but earlier. There must be some way to get at least a fair crop in a dry year.

Then, in 1886, a commission of the Parliament of Canada got the druggist, William Saunders, to start the experimental farms. For such a job, you would say he was as strange a man as any. He wasn't a scientist. He certainly wasn't a wheat farmer. Nobody would have called him an organizing genius. And he was already fifty years old, well off from a profitable drug business, comfortably fleshy.

Of course, on the side he had done some plum and crabapple breeding; he had invented bigger and better gooseberries; in fact he had a kind of fanatical theory that you ought to cross-breed all kinds of crops and fruits. But wheat? Who was William Saunders to help the farmers fight those enemies, the hot wind that blew their seed out of the ground, the dry Junes and Julys, the sudden terrible cold mornings in August?

He started a Central Experimental Farm at Ottawa, way back east; but he didn't stay there. No, the very first year he was off on a rough journey west.

By horse and wagon he jolted over the trail through Indian Head in Assiniboia. The hot winds blew his hat off over the forbidding brown lands around Moose Jaw. Hundreds of miles he drove, stopping at the poorest little homesteads.

He was always asking every farmer, "What is it this country needs most?" He was no hand to tell a man "What you must do, scientifically, is this or that!" Folks could tell he had sense. . . .

Everywhere the wheat men, wiping their foreheads, told William Saunders: "We've got to find some way of reaping something those years when the June and July rains don't come till August. We've got to ripen our wheat in time to get the jump on those August frosts."

Oh, there is no doubt that William Saunders, who was a kind man, had burned right into his brain the sadness of those fertile black lands of the prairies. But then, in those wanderings, the ex-druggist ran into a plain settler who had found out a kind of cultivation that got him good yields of hard Red Fife wheat, even in the dry years.

Maybe it is wrong to call it luck, because William Saunders' best knack was the sharp eye he had for plain, original men. He was after dirt farmers, not test tube agriculturists. And now, at Indian Head, in Assiniboia, where they call it a wet year when they get fifteen inches of rain, where the children then saw trees — but only in picture books — Saunders met Angus Mackay. Mackay was one of the first settlers, a tall Scotchman from Ontario, who had played a trick on nature—by discovering the summer fallow.

And that was really the first step toward finding the Marquis wheat. Now the way Angus Mackay found this drought-cheating summer fallow was by a most trick of chance, and Mackay was the first to admit that to William Saunders.

That grey-eyed settler had come out to Assiniboia in 1882, from Ontario. A bold pioneer? Not at all. Mackay and three friends had heard there was a lot of money being made in a land boom in Winnipeg. They hiked for Winnipeg. The boom had burst with a bang just before they got there. He would look foolish going back to Ontario now; so Mackay had taken the C.P.R. as far as it then ran, gone on by ox team to a place called Indian Head, twenty miles southeast of old Fort Qu'Appelle. Here he bought land. Had his great genius for picking rich land made him settle there? Not at all. A C.P.R. surveyor had told him here was where he'd find the very best wheat land in the Territories. Saunders simply could not get Angus Mackay to hand himself bouquets. "But this summer fallow?" asked Saunders.

Oh, yes—that was a strange piece of luck, and Mackay smiled. He had settled on his new land, stuck the point of his plow into the virgin prairie, turned up that strong clay loam in furrows so black and shiny you'd swear your feet would slide from under you if you try to walk on them. Year after year Nature was good. More land he broke, more of the hard Red Fife he reaped.

There was rain in June, there was warm weather in August. The gold in the ears of his spreading seas of Red Fife turned into gold in the pockets of Angus Mackay.

Then came disaster. In the middle eighteen-eighties he was going strong. He was bitten by that bug that bites every real wheat farmer in a good year. He would raise a world of wheat, would Mackay!

That spring he broke more virgin prairie. He got ready to put in his seed. Suddenly, a rebellion broke out among the Indians up north and the government people came along and commandeered his teams and his hired men to haul supplies for the troops.

What luck! All that summer – and there were fine rains too — the new broken prairie lay useless, fallow. "All I could do was harrow it a few times to keep down the weeds," said Mackay. But the fallow land? There it lay, sucking up rains that should have been making good Red Fife grow on it; but there it lay, bare, black, its dark straight furrows utterly useless. What luck. . .

Came the spring. The teams and their teamsters were back from the toy war in the north. Into the stubble land that Mackay had managed to crop the year before went the red seed from the drills.

And into the black furrows of that useless last year's fallow went the Red Fife, too. Now for a big crop!

Again disaster. The seed was in. May passed. The green down of the young wheat made all the acres beautiful. June passed and no rain. July came, and instead of rain, hot winds roaring all the way from Medicine Hat, and the mercury up into the nineties.

No rain—and what could this mean but hunger for the settlers of Assiniboia and misfortune for Mackay?

No, it meant luck for the whole Canadian land.

For, while the crops of the whole Northwest prairie were burning up in the rainless heat, on the farm of Mackay, there came to pass a miracle On the stubble land that had raised a crop the year before there wasn't enough of a crop to pull the binders out of the barn for — the wind cooked the poor heads as they shot out of stalks too short to cut. In the wheat grown on that stubble land Angus Mackay could walk between the miserable dried-up, dwarfed stools of wheat without tramping one down. It was no crop — two bushels to the acre maybe.

But on the land that had lain fallow the year before? A miracle! On that field waved a rippling ocean of plump, heavy spikes of the Red Fife. As the dry August came, those green heads turned a rich tawny yellow. Mackay had a grand crop on that fallow – thirty or forty bushels to the acre for sure. And that in the midst of a searing year that spread ruin in the Northwest.

"The farmers came from miles around to see those two fields," said Mackay. "I showed them how the crop on the fallow land compared with that burned-up stuff on the stubble." Mackay had that knack of comparing things. And he had the homely wit to turn Nature's cruelties into acts of friendship. "The fallow land last year took up the rain and saved it, no doubt," Mackay told the wondering settlers. "Then I kept harrowing it a little, keeping it bare; that must have kept the weeds from pumping out the water That's why the fallow land gave me this big crop this year.''

That was how settler Angus Mackay had learned to cheat the drought. Such was the experiment the strange chance of rebellion of one year and the drought of the next made for him. But it was an experiment, and Mackay saw it. He had this in common with Pasteur, with Faraday, with that unknown primitive man before the days of Moses who came upon wild wheat and had the hunch to tame it into bread — Mackay saw what lay under his nose.

So he began the summer fallow, the dry farming of the rich black lands of the Northwest. So he helped the pioneers get out of the frying pan of drought, made it possible for the settlers every year to reap something in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. So with his summer fallow he prepared the way for the tremendous crops of that stiff-strawed, upstanding Marquis wheat; in fact, Mackay's trick of the fallow made that wheat necessary. You will see why in a moment.

William Saunders heard this story, saw it, then made Mackay superintendent of the branch experiment farm at Indian Head. In the spring of '88, Angus began building that rude outdoor laboratory where the Marquis wheat was to be born. Now one of the best points about William Saunders was his mania for quantity. There must be a million experiments, every kind of test all over.

He started farms at Nappan, east in Nova Scotia; at Brandon in Manitoba, where he hired the experienced practical settler, Bedford, for superintendent.

Old William thought in continents, not in the fine graduations on a calibrated test tube. "Experiments at Indian Head or Brandon would be no safe guide for the farmers out in British Columbia," he said. So to the fern-covered valley of the Fraser River he sent the pioneer of Turtle Mountains, Thomas Sharpe, who has discovered on his own hook, a fine new heavy-yielding sort of potato.

Then in all these places Saunders started experiments on an unheard-of scale. Angus Mackay was buried under six varieties of barley, seven kinds of oats, twenty-three different sorts of potatoes, to say nothing of turnips and mangels— and 23,000 forest and fruit trees.

"Test these carefully," wrote William Saunders. No trees will grow on the prairie? No matter! This Gargantua must try anything, everywhere. . . Something must have told him: "Perchance something out of these thousands of grains, roots, seeds, trees, will catch on, grow, be of value.

Maybe his instinct told him this was the way Nature herself worked — wastefully. Meantime, from coast to coast, his superintendents sweated.

Never for a moment did William Saunders forget the farmers of the Northwest. "An early-ripening wheat to escape these August frosts — just a few days ahead of the Red Fife," they kept telling him and writing to him. Saunders sent over the face of the earth for all the wheats that were known. From Mr. Goegginger in Riga he got the Ladoga, that actually ripened in Russia at a latitude 600 miles north of that of Winnipeg, in Manitoba.

How he ran onto them I do not know, but he pored over the letters to Arch-deacon Denison from an obscure Moravian missionary in the high Himalaya Mountains. In those letters, Saunders read of strange early-ripening wheats – one of those fitter became the mother of the Marquis.

He sent out hundreds of different sorts of wheat to be tried — to Mackay, to Bedford, to Thomas Sharpe, who already had too much to do, to farmers who were eager to help experiment. But alas, the early-ripening imported wheats were miserable grain enough, compared to the good Red Fife. Frontiersmen away up in the Peace River and around Lake Athabasca tested the Ladoga — marvelous! It got ripe ahead of the frost — but the flour was yellow. Mackay Bedford, Sharpe, hundreds of settlers tested the Kurachee and the bearded Hard Calcutta from the Himalayas.

Oh, they were early enough. The coldest year would never faze them: you might grow them at the top of Hudson's Bay - but who's going to raise wheat yielding five bushels to the acre? It was an uphill business for Saunders.

But for William Saunders, who never stopped working, testing, pondering, every hour, every day but the few hours he took for sleep, there were more ways than one to skin a cat.

"I'll try breeding some of these early wheats with our Red Fife," he said. "We'd get a wheat for that, with the strong cream-colored flour of the Red Fife and the earliness of a Russian or Indian wheat!" he dreamed. But what a chance?

The poor chance of it never bothered Saunders. "Breeding wheat consists in bringing together different varieties of grain in the same way you bring together different strains of cattle," Saunders told the worried settlers. He talked as if it was as easy, as if it was as sure to get what he wanted as a man might be who led a grade cow to a pure-bred bull.

So, in the first days of July of 1892, in the valley of the Fraser River in British Columbia, the proud Red Fife as father and the early ripening Hard Calcutta as mother were married to beget the Marquis wheat. Saunders bred wheats himself, he ordered them bred, he saw to it they were bred from coast to coast in Canada. "Wheats might cross-breed better in the far West than at Ottawa - who knows?" he pondered. Science? No, it was only a guess, but a good point about old William was his trick of aiming all over the tree to bring down the squirrel.

So William sent one of his educated sons, Percy, on a jaunt across the prairies to the Pacific Coast. Percy Saunders was not a wheat expert, no authority on plant breeding, not even a botanist; he was a chemist, in fact. But before he left Ottawa, William Saunders showed him a few tricks, so off Percy went, cross-breeding his way through Brandon, Manitoba, Indian Head, Assiniboia – till he came to the Fraser Valley, at Agassiz in British Columbia.

At Fraser Valley, in British Columbia, he went at his work, helped by Thomas Sharpe. They set at work side by side in the little experimental wheat plots. They followed William's directions to the letter. With a little pair of forceps — that was the one piece of apparatus in their crude science — they turned back the still green chaff from the just-flowering Hard Red Calcutta.

Carefully they pulled back the green glumes from around the flowers. Tenderly they pulled out all the stamens from those flowers, the stamens that were the bearers of the pollen. They pulled them all out of the Hard Calcutta till you could call her a female wheat.

Then delicately they took a little of the golden pollen from a flower of the good Red Fife growing close by. That pollen they dusted on the feathery pistils of the female Hard Calcutta. Gently they turned back the green chaff of this mother wheat into place, to protect the pistils they had fertilized. And around the spikes of that mother wheat they wrapped thin Manilla paper to keep chance pollen away. On this paper they marked: "Red Fife, male; Hard Calcutta, female."

Twenty-three such marriages of wheats they made in those early days of July, 1892. Percy Saunders went home. Thomas watched those wheats, waited. Would the crosses take?

Thomas Sharpe tended those fateful heads, cared for them, saw to it no birds got at them.

Exactly at the proper time, when the heads were ripe, Sharpe nipped them off at the top of the stalk, packed them in a little seed bag, mailed them to William Saunders at Ottawa. It was a great success. Many of the heads had set seed.

But who was it made the forgotten cross whose kernel was the ancestor of the Marquis? Was it Percy Saunders or Sharpe?' History says it was Percy. But the truth of it, as old Thomas will tell you, is lost in oblivion. And he cares not a fig! Nearly eighty, he is above the vanity that comes from the glories of discoveries.

The seed bag from Agassiz, sent by Sharpe, started for William Saunders at Ottawa.

Then, by what a narrow squeak William Saunders ever got his new, early ripening wheat! This way goes the story.

One morning at the central farm at Ottawa, the little bag from Sharpe got dumped out on the office floor with the rest of the mail. In came two farm boys. They started playing ball with that

bag. Ho! This was fun! They felt still better. They began to shy that bag at each other. They began kicking it at each other. Then one shot went wild. Out of sight in a corner on top of a cupboard landed the little bag, holding inside it the fame of half a dozen men, the beginnings of a wheat every bit as strong as the Red Fife and ten days earlier – a grain that meant a gain of wealth of twenty millions and more a year to the farmers of the Northwest prairie. That meant wheat in the frost years.

The two farm boys ran out of the office, forgot all about their plaything. Dust began to settle on that bag.

But a roar from William Saunders. "Where are those new cross-bred wheats Thomas Sharpe writes me he's mailed?''

Everybody quit everything else and looked high and low — everywhere, excepting on top of that cupboard.

Then somebody had the hunch to look there.

William Saunders took the seed out of the little bag that had come so near not coming from Thomas Sharpe. He planted them in his back yard — with careful labels to tell them apart from the dozens of other new wheats there.

He patted down the soil over them, just so. What would come of them?

Time and again wheats he had bred himself and thought were fine, flopped on him. To the settlers he sent the Preston, the bearded Huron, the bald Percy — heavy-yielding, ten days earlier ripening than Fife. Bad luck!

Every year they planted the seed of the cross-bred children of the Red Fife and the Hard Calcutta along with all the rest. Macoun tended the little plots.

Quite a little earlier those children were ripening. . . Some of them certainly were taking after their father, the Red Fife, too. They had mighty fine hard red kernels. So Saunders the elder and William T. Macoun laid the foundations for that great day in the frost year of 1907-----

Of course, William Saunders had something else besides grief. The settlers were going great guns in the Northwest. Oats were averaging better than fifty bushels to the acre, instead of around thirty as they had done in the eighties And wheat? In spite of frost, rust, crows, hail, grasshoppers and rainless years they were getting twenty bushels to the acre now where they'd only reaped fifteen before.

Mackay? He was the salt of the prairie. From hundreds of miles away, across those sealike, treeless prairies, they came to see Mackay's experiments at Indian Head. In a day, 2000 would come from Moose Jaw and Regina, in Sunday school picnics, on excursions. The settlers

followed Angus Mackay on to the weedless, immaculate rows of his experimental plots. Searcher for truth that he was, Angus Mackay had done his original experiment over and over.

"A piece of stubble or root land has been ploughed in the fall and sown with Red Fife in the following spring," he told the settlers. "Another piece has been gang ploughed in the spring at the time of seeding; another piece sown by drill without being worked before or after seeding." He showed the settlers the stands of wheat on those lands. . . .

"And alongside." he would end up, "a piece of fallow land has been sown for comparison.''

It wasn't so much what Angus told them — the settler knew any wise-cracker could talk — it was what they saw there on those fields side by side. . . Mackay kept repeating, insisting in his mild way "Our seasons point to only one way in which in all years we can expect to reap something... We have only one wet season in the year. The land must be ploughed the first time before this season is over. Every year, a half, or at least a third of the settler's land should be in summer fallow."

More and more, these farmers listened to Mackay.

Then came a dry year and that comparer reported: "We have in this district and I doubt not in others also, farmers who have this year thirty to forty bushels per acre on fallow land, whereas on their stubble land, equally good soil, only eight to fifteen bushels,"

What an incomparable leader, teacher that man was!

He urged them to sow early. He told them every kink of cultivation he had cooked up from his vast stored-up lore of the sky, hot winds, skimpy rains, black earth. And best of all, he kept writing to William Saunders to give them an early-ripening hard red wheat —

The century turns. The frost still threatens. Wise old William Saunders is going on seventy. He is still the plodding, slow, perpetual-motion-machine kind of worker. How his ponderous experiments grow; forty-one, then sixty-five, next seventy-two, now 119 sorts of spring wheats he tests, year after year, at Ottawa.

Then an accident again — there are too many wheats now; he hires his son, Dr. Charles E. Saunders, to fuss with those new wheats. It seems outlandish to picture Doctor Charles as a wheat hunter. . .

Slender, tall, not too healthy, Charles cared most for the refined things of life. True, he was a doctor of philosophy in chemistry, but his father had made him study that. For years he had studied singing, in New York and London.

He a wheat hunter? And yet, if old William Saunders hadn't put his son at that job, there might never have been a Marquis; but then, that's the grand part of the Marquis story—the whole affair was a business of ifs and huts.

Of course, the two Williams, Saunders and Macoun, had cleared the ground in fine shape for this
cultured Charles when he started sorting out those spring wheats. For years they had toiled, rogued, selected, hand-picked their hundred sorts of wheat.

Now among these already pretty good wheats, Charles Saunders had got from his father to breed and fuss with, there was in particular one of those five children of the Red Fife and the Hard Calcutta – begot in that marriage trade at Agassiz on the farm of Thomas Sharpe in 1892 William Saunders had baptised that wheat Markham.

Along with dozens of other more or less promising kinds of wheat, Charles Saunders began picking out plants from the plots of this Markham. Why? Heaven only knows! Out of the ninety-three wheats he was testing, this Markham was a miserable yielder — eighty-fifth in the list! It weighed only fifty-eight pounds to the measured bushel.

But Charles Saunders sowed the grain from the heads of that poor-yielding Markham. He was smart with his fingers, careful, accurate. New stools of wheat, children of the Markham, shot up in the spring of 1904. "Would they make strong flour?" That was what old William had told Charles to look for.

Charles Saunders took a few of those Markham kernels, put them in his mouth and chewed carefully so as not to swallow them, till they wadded up in a ball in his mouth, like chewing gum. That was an old trick of practical wheat men, who said: "The gummier the wheat gum, the stronger the flour from it."

The next spring Charles Saunders planted the seed from those spikes that gave the gummy kernels. Then in 1906 he gave the wheat that grew from them the name of — Marquis

Now old William Saunders, wise from his twenty years of getting fooled by his fancy, new, early ripening, heavy-yielding wheats that fell down when it came to being milled into flour, had bought a toy roller mill. And if Allis-Chalmers hadn't put out that little mill — or if William Saunders hadn't had the foresight to buy one — but that's another one of the ifs of the Marquis.

Charles Saunders put the red grain of the Marquis into the new little mill, ground it, then wrote: "Marquis wheat ripens a few days before Red Fife. Produces very strong flour of very good color." That was all. Dig into his reports of that year, and you will find no bands playing nor any rockets being set off about Marquis.

No, there were no fireworks let off that year on account of the Marquis. To be sure, the greatest wheat breeding genius in the world could not have foretold for a moment what the Marquis would do on the prairies.

But let's try out all the strong flour wheats on the Western farms. That was the habit of Old Saunders, who was too wise to put much trust in little, elaborate, careful experiments anyway. So now, in the routine course of events — no great hopes or bands playing, mind you! — he sent out West the Chelsea, the excellent early Red Fife called H, the strong flour wheat called the Gatineau. And among them the Marquis. All these were sent to the new experiment farm at Lacombe in Alberta. But especially, they were sent to Angus Mackay.

What a year 1907 was! It was "the champion season – for exceptional badness. All of April, the cold black earth was hard as granite under cold gray skies. No seed could be got in till the seventh of May, weeks late. And then – with no particular exceptions – Mackay got the seed of the Red Fife wheat called H, the Chelsea, the fair-to-middling Marquis under the ground along with a lot of other spring wheats. Three weeks late everything was – and what would the last of August, September be like? "We can only wait," said the serene Angus Mackay.

Then came that nervous August. The sun seemed to lose its force. Gray clouds scudded low. The morning of the first of August — temperature, 35 degrees. The morning of the twentieth — down went the mercury to 33.

There was a turn — for the worse. Cold rain came, turning the fields into slippery surfaces of black gumbo glue. And the Red Fife? It had hardly begun to turn from green to yellow. "It is the worst season known since this country was settled in 1882," said Mackay. Then the sky cleared. And on the night of September twelfth it froze. But Angus Mackay is a serene, methodical man.

Out to the field lots he went. Look — here was the Red Fife, green, already hit by the frost. The Huron, the Preston, the Pringle's Champlain — worse off than the Fife, if anything. Hardly fit to cut.

But what's this? Here was a bald, stiff-strawed wheat, heads red-gold, kernels hard, good and plump. Here that wheat stood ripe amongst the ruins of the others. It was the Marquis.

On the fifteenth of that cold September, Angus Mackay harvested this Marquis. Yield – forty-one bushels to the acre.

Then at last the farmers of those Northwest lands reaped their reward for their faith in Angus Mackay. In the sad fall of 1907, when too many families had no threshing at all to do, Angus Mackay set off for the Exhibition at Regina with a bushel of fine, hard red wheat – it would have been hard for the most expert inspector to tell that seed from the Red Fife. "This is the Marquis," Mackay told the settlers. "On pea land it ripened nine or ten days ahead of the Red Fife – it stood the cold. Look at it! It ripened six days ahead of the killing frost. And on summer fallow? Well, it looks as if it will get ripe as quick on fallow as the Fife does on stubble."

There was a bable of questions. "Where can we get that wheat, Mr. Mackay?" Mooney, the seed dealer, offered ten dollars for that lone bushel of the Marquis. Over the prairies ran the news of this heavy-yielding hard grain that had got the jump on the frost.

So, just twenty years after the summer fallow had begun to cheat the drought – to spread its black acres out from Indian Head, the red-gold glint of the frost-cheating fields of the Marquis began to spread over the Northwest land.

As fast as Mackay could multiply the seed, out to the settlers went bags of the flinty red seed to make the land from Winnipeg, through Regina, and north toward Saskatoon look like a great bowl for God to eat out of.

"Yes," said Angus Mackay, now past eighty-five, "it was all due to the foresight of William Saunders. He saw that we needed an early-ripening wheat."

Mackay himself? Why should anybody make a to-do over him? asked that old settler. He smiled, then said:

"No it was the fact of the frost that made the Marquis wheat."